New technologies empower visitor management systems to improve physical security efficiency and cost-effectiveness

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Government regulations are driving increased security levels for visitor management. Private industry, where the need to manage and monitor visitors is an equally high security priority, is following suit. As a result, access control and visitor management are evolving and becoming more rooted in an organisation’s overall physical security structure.

Other catalysts pushing this trend are increased integration capabilities of visitor management systems with a range of access control systems, new and ongoing software development that provides enhanced feature sets, and additional hardware offerings for turnkey visitor management solutions.

Integration for simplified operation

Advanced visitor management solutions allow true, real-time system integration, providing more
user-intuitive registration and badging processes, among other benefits. They can integrate with existing IT infrastructure including SQL and Oracle databases, and ODBC and LDAP directory systems. The ability to populate calendars with vCards through Microsoft Outlook further facilitates overall ease of operation.

Additional levels of integration further expand the utility of today’s more powerful advanced visitor management platforms. A combined visitor management and access control system allows users to consolidate entrance and exit activities onto a single system for improved management in a distributed environment. The single interface enables greater speed and accuracy in scanning and tracking visitors as well as greater control via user-defined security access privileges and real-time activation and de-activation of badges. As an example, the system can be programmed to automatically grant authorised visitors pre-determined access privileges. This is especially useful for high risk operations such as financial institutions and defence contractors, who use the application to enhance security and accountability.

Enhanced features for turnkey and enterprise applications

From an operations and tactical perspective, today’s more robust visitor management solutions offer numerous features for turnkey and enterprise applications. First and foremost is the ability to network multiple buildings on corporate campuses and/or multiple geographical locations, providing each location the capability of setting their own policies, with mass notification capabilities for informational or emergency purposes.
For facilities with high-security areas such as government installations, power plants, and R&D facilities, incorporating non-disclosure agreements, safety agreements, and export control requirements provides an added layer of security and liability protection. Where visitor management is installed in a high-security, multi-tenant locations, the software can be configured for each tenant with customised entry requirement data and unique, self-expiring badges. And by communicating with watch lists in real time, advanced visitor management software can block flagged individuals from obtaining visitor and access credentials. The processing power of these platforms to perform ID matches in real-time can actually help thwart potential problems from happening by simply denying access from the start.

Hardware solutions like self-serve kiosks and initiatives such as online pre-registration streamline visitor management

Pre-registering visitors
Another convenience is the ability for organisations to pre-register visitors, which speeds the registration process while also making it even more secure. The visitor is sent an email notification containing a barcode which can be scanned, either from a printed copy of the email or right from their smartphone. Check in takes only seconds. Advanced software can also send email notifications with the visitor’s photo to the host upon sign-in. Scanning drivers’ licences and passports using relatively inexpensive off-the-shelf devices also speeds up the visitor management process while ensuring higher levels of identification in the visitor management process.

Feature sets found on today’s advanced visitor management systems also include the ability for schools and children’s hospitals to perform an instant sex offender registry search for every visitor. Additionally, healthcare facilities can utilise powerful HL-7 patient tracking capabilities, and government facilities can process PIV-compliant credentials in compliance with Homeland Security Presidential Directive 12 (HSPD-12), which is required for most government buildings.

On a daily operations level, the processes of pre-registering visitors via a web browser, issuing parking passes, and customising unique badges for different visitor classifications further streamlines operations while improving security.

New hardware solutions

The days of home-grown solutions for visitor management are long gone thanks to the variety of automated systems now available. Hardware solutions such as self-serve kiosks are found in locations such as hospitals, schools and corporate facilities to enable a self-sign in process for visitors. Visitors simply scan their identification, enter the appropriate data and print a badge, complete with photo. The system notifies the host, via e-mail, of the visitor’s arrival and records all data in an easy to use format. Mobile tablet solutions also make it possible to verify visitors at any location including entry gates and checkpoints to create accurate audit trails. It’s convenient, it’s fast and it provides security management with an increased level of efficiency and cost effectiveness.

Whether hardware or software based, today’s visitor management systems do much more than
enhance “front door” security measures. From sophisticated integration capabilities to feature-rich functionality, visitor management systems leverage technology to improve management of physical security.

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